

John H. Cutler
1910-1998



Second Thoughts

For John H. Cutler

By JANE BRADLEY

For those of us who love the *Clipper* and its tenacious commitment to local coverage, balanced but tough scrutiny of issues, and just plain entertaining weekly dish of stories, we feel a death in the family with the loss of John Henry Cutler, our founder, leader, and editor par excellence.

I came to the *Clipper* having worked for other weeklies and dailies, including the *New York Times* and the *Boston Globe*.

But my heart belongs to the *Clipper*, and it was stolen by John.

"Come write for us," he told me back in 1987 after a *Globe* column had appeared. "Write about anything, but give it to us. The *Clipper* is a great paper, and we have a great tradition of writers."

John liked to boast, or perhaps, more accurately, he liked things to be measured by their fullest expression. He could probably exist on a steady diet of politics and history, which he read constantly until the day he died — despite nearly failed eyesight and a much-diminished physical capacity. His daughter, Gail, would read to him or he would listen to books on tape, but he was always reading, learning, looking for a new nugget to store in his encyclopedic mind.

Of all his children and of all his great pleasures and searing pain, the *Clipper* was his baby, his and his late wife Bobbie's. In some ways, they made it up as they went along after launching the newsheet in 1950 from their home. (For a delightful account of their publishing adventure, read *Put It On the Front Page, Please!*, and for a moving insight into the Cutler's brilliant and tragic life, read *Make the Bold Move*, both written by John.)

The *Clipper* today is much the way it was years ago, and it is this look, feel, style, and emphasis that make it unique, if not idiosyncratic. John set a writing style that is the *Clipper's* own, taking an intimate tone and ranking stories according to local standards. For example, a clambake might be on the front alongside a hot political issue, while a crime report would be buried in the back.

Yet, he brought to his paper a literary sophistication, assuming his Duxbury readers deserved it. The ranks of writers he attracted over the years include several from national publications, published authors, and editors. For special-interest columns on books, gardening, birding, fishing, cooking, sports and politics, he could always cajole the most knowledgeable and talented writers to climb aboard the *Clipper* ship.

One of his favorite sports was editing, and it would give him particular glee to find a grammatical mistake. "Aha!" I remember him saying to me with a twinkle. "You said 7 am in the morning! That's redundant!"

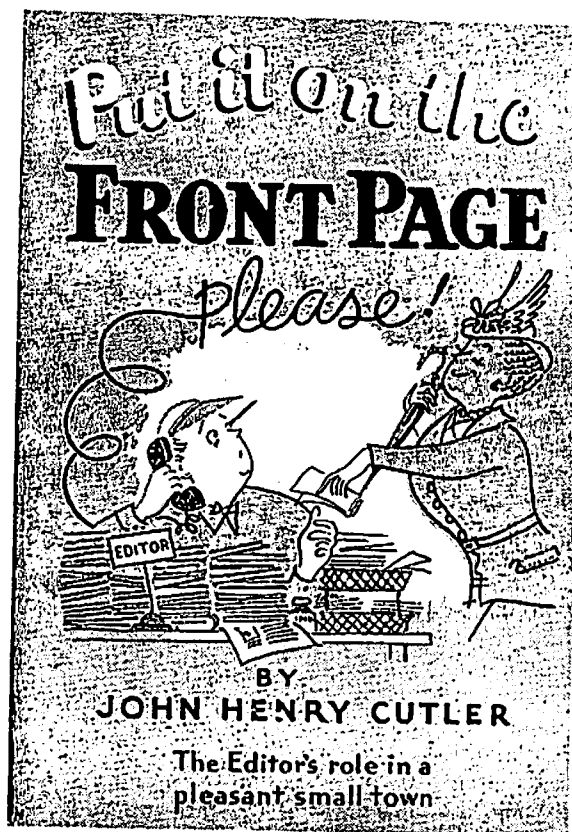
John Cutler was not always the easiest boss; he was colorful and could be stubborn. But he knew the secret of the newspaper business better than anyone: print the stories that directly affect and reflect your community. Period. He even kept his advertising space to a minimum so he could cram more club news, prom pictures, school scores, planning board discussion, letters, and, of course, the police blotter, into its pages.

In recent years, his strength had been sapped by a stroke and his spirit by the loss of his beloved Bobbie. Still, every day he came into the office to assume his customary position in the newsroom, surrounded by his daughter, Gail, and his other family, the *Clipper* staff, headed by Managing Editor Paula Maxwell.

Political leaders, irate citizens, and old pals still called on him and prevailed on the *Clipper*, and John wouldn't miss it for the world. But for his friends, colleagues, and readers, we now will have to.



A familiar pose -- John working at his desk.



John chronicled the early days of the Clipper in *Put it on the Front Page, Please!*

My Tribute to John

By SUSANNA SHEEHAN

I will miss John Cutler very much.

I will miss John for many reasons. One of the main reasons is because he made me feel like a special part of a special place — the *Duxbury Clipper*.

When I would walk into the *Clipper* offices to drop off a story I'd written, he always greeted me cheerfully, his voice booming across his desk piled high with thick biographies, *New Yorkers*, *Time* magazines and *National Geographics*.

"Well, helloooo Susanna!" he'd intone.

I felt instantly glad I'd come.

"Hi, John," I'd shout, for he was hard of hearing. "Here's my selectmen's story."

"Oh, good, good," John would respond, and taking pen in hand, he would edit the piece of writing I offered.

He'd often tell me he was impressed with my writing because he could find few grammatical mistakes — a high compliment coming from the man who wrote the book "Tips on Writing." These compliments warmed me and encouraged me.

Afterwards, John would also tell me that he was glad to have me at the *Clipper*, even though he would also joke about how he found me hard to get to know early on. He would say I was a bit standoff-ish.

"Wasn't she Paula?" he would shout across the room he shared with managing editor Paula Maxwell.

"Yes, John!" Paula would shout back.

"But you're really not that way at all, now that I've gotten to know you," John would say to me. "We like you around here," he'd add.

"Thanks John," I'd reply, feeling happy and proud that a man as literate, educated, and experienced as John Cutler could appreciate me and my writing.

This conversation would repeat itself on many occasions, and slowly over the 4 years that I knew him, I came to see John as more than just a pen-wielding publisher behind a big desk. He was a vibrant, interesting man, full of fascinating and true stories, who gained all of my admiration and respect.

I will miss these conversations. I will miss his stories, his compliments and his generosity.

John could be extremely generous. He would often treat the *Clipper* staff to lunch or ice cream and each summer he would host a staff appreciation party at his home. He would tell me — loudly enough so that all the staff could hear — what a great group of people he had working at the *Clipper*. He showed his appreciation to them and to me many times, and on those occasions, I was happy to be included as part of his *Clipper* family.

I realized now that John was the *Clipper*, and for me, it won't be the same without him.

I will miss his unfailing commitment to creating a respectful hometown newspaper that focuses on publishing the good news about Duxbury. When I first began with the paper, I wondered why it did not run crime and police stories on the front page, because, to me, that was the interesting news. But I came to see that John purposefully made the *Clipper* into a paper that supported Duxbury and its people. He did not try to muckrake or focus on the negative. In fact, I used to think the *Clipper* was somewhat silly to publish all the articles and blurbs about local people, but I've come to realize that those are the stories people want to read in their hometown newspaper. That's what community is all about. The *Clipper* cares about Duxbury, and in these times of violence and scandal in society and in the media, the *Clipper*, like Duxbury, is a haven.

That's what John made it into and that's what he wanted it to be. He was extremely proud of the *Clipper* for this reason and because everyone in town knew his paper was the voice of and the record for the town.

I am proud to be a part of the *Clipper* and to have known John Henry Cutler, the man and the publisher. I hope his legacy, the *Duxbury Clipper*, will live on as he would have wanted it to — an independent positive reflection of the people and the community of Duxbury.

I will miss John very much.

Duxbury Clipper, Wednesday, September 23, 1998



Duxbury Lost a Publishing Legend This Week

(Ed Perry of Duxbury, owner and general manager of WATD in Marshfield, offered the following remarks to his listening audience last Friday.)

Words are the stock and trade of this business we call news. Words are all we've got. Just words. Words people spin into stories. But sometimes you wait too long to harvest the words. John Cutler and his wife, Bobbie, started the *Duxbury Clipper* back in 1950. It is one of the best local newspapers in the state, perhaps even in the country. John knew everyone in town. He wrote books; he told stories. John Cutler was just plain fun, and one day I was going to spend half a day with him. Half a day. Just John and me and my tape recorder sitting around his old wooden desk in the *Clipper* newsroom. What an interview that would be.

John had the great stories. He watched Duxbury change from a sleepy little fishing and farming town to a rich bedroom community, and his newspaper chronicled the change. John knew everyone from the Kennedys who ran the country to the O'Neils who ran the dairy. I wanted that interview with John Cutler. But something always came up. I knew John was 88, but somehow it seemed he'd always be there. But on Wednesday, John Cutler died. And all those stories went with him. All those stories I always meant to hear. Sometimes you wait too long to harvest the words. I'm Ed Perry for WATD news.

A Sporting Thought...

By MIKE HALLORAN

Being one of the few male members of the *Clipper* staff and probably the only male member who frequently makes appearances at the *Clipper* office, I had the great fortune of being able to talk sports with John Cutler on my weekly visits.

Despite John's vision and hearing problems, he had an incredible knack for knowing everything current about the state of affairs on the Boston sports scene.

His knowledge of the Red Sox rotation and his ability to recall such minute details as Derek Lowe's success or failure in his last middle relief role were true indications that despite his reputation as a ghost writer and political commentator, his 88-year-old mind was adept at cataloging the many stories of Boston sports lore.

Many of us can remember seeing Ted Williams, Bill Russell, and Bobby Orr showcasing their Hall of Fame talents, but John may be the only man I have ever known who could honestly tell me he had seen Babe Ruth play a game of baseball. That fact alone has always impressed me because it made me aware that deep within his mind were events he had witnessed, which to me are mere legends passed through generations with accounts altered by numerous tellings.

His love for the athletes of Duxbury was sincere, and my weekly accounts of their exploits were truly enjoyable for him to hear. He was proud of the kids that played for DHS, and on many occasions he reminded me how lucky I was to write in a town with such great athletes.

I always agreed with him and let him know that I loved the opportunity to write for the *Clipper* as it fulfilled a lifelong dream to someday become a sportswriter.

I'll miss those chats with John Cutler, the rest of the office being oblivious to the workings of the Boston sports nation, but I also know that he goes to his final resting place having lived a long and fruitful life of achievement, an ending any of us would be proud of.

Before I Forget

By LEO EGAN

John and I had an agreement just between the 2 of us. Being of the same age, when sudden death was ever present, we agreed that when the time came, the survivor would say a few words about the other.

I hereby honor that pact.

If John had had his druthers I'm sure he would have wanted to live long enough to see the Red Sox in the playoffs.

His love the Red Sox went way back to his youth when he lived close enough to Fenway Park to chase a homerun that landed on Landsdowne St. His home was in the Brookline Ave. — Riverway section near the old Sears Roebuck Store. So he must have spent a lot of his young life at Fenway Park.

That's where I first met him — at Fenway, and also at the City Hall of James Michael Curley, where he became inspired to author those wonderful literary treasurers.

It was many years later that fate led me to Duxbury and one day to the *Clipper* office where we renewed our allegiance to the Red Sox.

We were both impatient with the team over the years. We both hoped to live long enough to see that elusive World Series victory.

Our most recent bull sessions at the *Clipper* were unique, to say the least. I was becoming hard of hearing and John was losing his eyesight.

Clipper managing editor Paula Maxwell's desk was in the same room and she often had to act as arbiter when John and I grew testy.

I lost my temper one day and I headed for the door shouting, "I quit. I'm through."

Fortunately, when I reached home the phone was ringing and John was shouting, "I reject your resignation."

Duxbury will miss John, just as we missed his wife Bobbie when she passed away.

Their love affair with this town through the pages of the *Clipper* has ended. But, hopefully, their family will make certain that 48 years is not long enough.

As for John, I'll miss him. He taught me how to write a column -- how to accentuate the personal and, when called upon, how to say all of the above.

Drop a Line

By LINDY BLAISDELL



Over 30 years ago, shortly after moving to Duxbury, I went down to the *Clipper* office, then located in Halls Corner, looking for part-time photography work. Meeting John Cutler was quite an experience. I had with me a new single-lens reflex Mamiya camera and a telephoto lens. John looked at my camera, then said they didn't need anyone right then, but to come back again sometime.

Within a few months I ran over my Mamiya, bought a Nikon E.T.N., joined the Duxbury Camera Club, and met Dick Cotton. Dick suggested I go down to the *Clipper* office and apply for a photographer's job. I went to see John again, this time with a Nikon and a recommendation from Dick and got the job.

Once John Cutler found out I had a sports background, especially football, I was assigned to take most of the high school sports pictures. On most of my visits to the *Clipper*, John and I talked sports. John not only loved sports but loved kids. I would listen for what seemed like hours to his stories about politicians he knew that played one sport or another. I would mention the name of a player I knew and John would want to know his size and weight. Position and team were always secondary to size and weight.

I don't know if it was because I was a halfback or a photographer that he introduced me to his son, David. David was starting a newspaper in Marshfield and needed a photographer. I gave it a shot and not only covered Duxbury but also Marshfield, Norwell, and Scituate.

John was not a fisherman; however, David was. I could see how much like John David was. We became fast friends, fishing, playing tennis, and working together.

Two years ago John was looking for a writer to write the "Drop a Line" weekly column. John called David who recommended me back to him. I consider it an honor to be passed over to David by John, then passed back to John by David. My association with the *Clipper* has been a very positive experience for over 30 years. I hope that in John's next life, he takes time to go fishing. Many thanks to the *Clipper*, its readers, and the Cutler family for enriching my life.

Commentary...

Dear *Duxbury Clipper* Staff:

My husband, Don, and I were dismayed to learn of John's passing via a phone call from my sister in Hanover. John was a real presence in my life, not only during the years we lived in Duxbury, but also through our subsequent Atlanta years and finally those here at Seabrook Island, SC. We never lost touch. I loved John with my whole heart and soul (as I had his wife, Bobbie), and will always feel privileged I was able to profile his literary life for a Boston newspaper, and write a *Clipper* feature on Bobbie as well. It only added to my respect and admiration of this pair.

What courage the 2 of them had! Indomitable, she always a pool of calm, he unflinching in his honesty, and both of them charming and fun. John and I shared a fascination for politics, and whenever my husband and I were back in town, we always stopped at the paper, there to once again sit and laugh and feel at home.

Duxbury has lost a treasure, of course. He is now one of those departed Duxbury giants, joining men like Dr. Lansing Bennett and former selectman Ed Dondero, whose efforts to better the town he squarely supported. What a Heavenly Town Meeting that must be!

Nancy Anne Dawe
Seabrook Island, SC